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C O N F I D E N T I A L OSLO 000059

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FOR S

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/13/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [NO](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S INTRODUCTORY CALL ON FM STOERE

REF: STATE 5477

Classified By: Ambassador Benson K. Whitney, reason 1.4 and d.

1. (C) Summary. In the Ambassador's introductory call on Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere January 13, the FM said that maintaining close ties to the United States was a top priority and noted that the U.S. is "Norway's most important ally." FM Stoere is keen to promote even closer cooperation on "High North" issues and hopes that the Secretary will accept his invitation to visit Norway's north, perhaps in conjunction with her trip to the Sofia NATO Ministerial.

2. (C) FM Stoere brought up the unfortunate comments of Finance Minister Halvorsen (leader of the Socialist Left party) regarding boycotting Israel, and noted his immediate effort to set the record straight -- hence his letter to the Secretary making it clear that there was no change in

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Norway's policy towards Israel, nor will there be. On Iran, Stoere said he will meet El Baradei on January 17 and that while he understood the need for the IAEA to refer the matter to the UNSC, Stoere worries that the UNSC will not take action and that we will have another situation like North Korea. Finally, Stoere raised Guantanamo, making clear that while it is an issue of concern for most Norwegians, he does not want to be confrontational. Stoere said that Norway's position is not/not that we should close Guantanamo but rather that detainees should be afforded the same rights as POWs under the Geneva Convention. End Summary.

FM Stoere Stresses Importance of Relationship with U.S.

3. (C) The Ambassador had a pleasant, productive, hour-long first meeting with Foreign Minister Stoere January 13, only one day after presenting his credentials to the King. FM Stoere said he wants to maintain close ties with the United States and stressed we are "Norway's most important ally." The Foreign Minister noted that while most choose to focus on political issues, it is the depth of the relationship, including the vibrant cultural, educational, science fields, that keeps our nations bonded together.

4. (C) The Foreign Minister noted that it is a change for the far left Socialist Left party to be included in government but that one needs to understand that the Socialist Left party has come a long way as it now accepts NATO and the Transatlantic link as an pillar of Norwegian foreign policy. "We have come a long way since the 1950s, when SV was founded in protest to the Alliance," the FM remarked. That said, the FM acknowledged that there will be moments of heartburn, as with (Socialist Left) Finance Minister Halvorsen's comment, that she ended up retracting, that she supports a boycott of Israel. The Foreign Minister emphasized that he worked immediately and intensively as soon as he heard the remark to set the record straight -- hence the letters to Secretary Rice and FM Shalom. The Ambassador noted that we appreciated the Minister's quick response and unequivocal reaffirmation that Norway does not, and will not, support a boycott of Israel. Additionally, the Ambassador expressed appreciation for the Foreign Minister's commitment to preserving strong bilateral ties and pledged to do his part to work to advance common objectives.

5. (C) The Ambassador took the opportunity to thank the Minister for his support on the Embassy's efforts to relocate to a new, more secure site. The FM remarked that the city council vote to approve the move was indeed dramatic but "all is well that ends well." The FM encouraged the Embassy to reach out to the community in Huseby (site of the NEC) and ensure that it feels that the Embassy will be a good neighbor.

FM Keen to have the Secretary Visit Norway's High North

6. (C) FM Stoere suggested that the U.S. and Norway could further strengthen their cooperation by engaging in a meaningful dialogue about High North (i.e., Arctic issues, including energy, environment and non-proliferation) and hoped that the Secretary would soon accept his invitation to visit northern Norway. The FM thought that perhaps the

Secretary could visit in connection with her upcoming trip to

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the NATO Ministerial in April and he will be putting together some concrete dates and thoughts on a possible program for the Secretary. The Foreign Minister also mentioned that he had discussed with U/S Burns the possibility of a high-level session on the high north in Washington sometime in the next few months. The Ambassador noted that the United States is also interested in deepening the dialogue on the high north. In fact, the Ambassador will make his first trip outside Oslo

to visit the Norway's northernmost region at the end of this month.

Guantanamo - Under Pressure, FM Raises it in Low-key Way

17. (C) With the Socialist Left party and local chapter of Amnesty International calling for the government to urge us to close down Guantanamo, the Foreign Minister raised concerns about the limited rights afforded detainees. The FM made clear that while this is a hot-button issue for most Norwegians, the government will not/not join calls for Guantanamo's closure. "The U.S. has a right to hold people who are terrorists and a threat to its national security," the FM said, but in his view U.S. interests would be better served if the detainees were treated as POWs under the Geneva convention. "No one is outside the law," he remarked. Stoere then said that he plans to present us with the legal and political arguments for why this is the case.

Referring Iran to the UNSC - Norway Open, But Not There Yet

18. (C) Per reftel, the Ambassador urged Norway to support an emergency IAEA Board of Governors' meeting to vote affirmatively to report Iran to the UNSC. The Minister noted that they had called in the Iranian Ambassador prior to the EU-3 announcement and made clear Norway's deep concerns about Iran's resumption of its uranium enrichment research. The FM has publicly acknowledged that while Norway supports efforts to find a diplomatic solution, "this latest development makes this more difficult and brings the matter one step closer to the UNSC." Stoere, though, remained committed to trying to find a diplomatic solution and worried that if the matter is referred to the UNSC it will meet the same fate as North Korea -- and "simply sit in the UNSC's in-box." Stoere also expressed concern that the current devolving situation could lead to a military option and that therefore it was imperative that this be managed wisely. Stoere said he will be meeting with DG ElBaradei in Vienna on January 17. The Ambassador stressed that it was essential that the international community continue to press Iran.

Comment

19. (C) Foreign Minister Stoere was engaging and keen to highlight the premium he places on the bilateral relationship with the U.S., as usual. Stoere's actions also match his words. He was quick and aggressive in making Norway's position on Israel clear and his efforts resulted in getting Finance Minister Halvorsen to apologize for her statement. Stoere also supported the Embassy's move with a timely letter to the City Council, even though it was politically dicey to do so. And, by meeting the Ambassador, as soon as he presented his credentials, Stoere was signaling that he is eager to develop a close partnership with the United States. Stoere is the one shining light in the Stoltenberg cabinet, and the more we can do to enhance his standing within the government, the better. A visit by the Secretary would be the ultimate feather in his cap; we hope it becomes possible.

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